

The Archetypal Forms in Brancusi Sculptures. A Syntactic Interpretation

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Abstract: My intention in this paper is to make a semiotic interpretation of Brancusi works. In this paper we will talk about the first part of the semiotic, which is the syntax. The starting point will be the relationship between the signified-signifier-signification.

Keywords: the mioritic space; stylistic matrix; ovoid cycle; the drawings of the dices faces; archetype; stylistic factors

*„I polished the matter to find out the continuous line.
And when I found that I can not find it,
I stopped, as if someone unseen gave me over my hands”
Constantin Brancuși*

First of all we ought to do a little introduction, with reference to the concept of archetype in terms of its importance in the work of Brâncuși. It seems that the sculptor was influenced by the cubists and black art, due the geometric forms; Paleolog actually believe that there was some synchrony between cubism and black art, the fact is that black art exists in Europe in the period in which the artists reveals successively sculptures as: Prayer, Gorgeous bird, Portrait of Miss Pogany. Throw Brancusi „sculpture becomes free from the chains of the logical mind” (Paleolog, 1976, p. 18.). For Brancusi, form was the most important predicate aesthetic, because of it the sculpture managed to decipher a language dead of thousands of years: horizontality, verticality, density, weight and the importance given to the light and space is both creation and Brancusi as creator, as perceived today in the art history, as *the father of the modern sculpture*.

Historically speaking archetype was considered by Plato a concept that described the prototype, ideal of sensitive items, imperfect representations and copy of itself. In terms of C. G. Jung archetypes are remnants of a „collective unconscious, is a

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part of the psyche that can be distinguished from the personal unconscious, by the fact that he does not owe the existence of the personal experience and therefore is not personal gain” (Yung, 1994, p. 21.). If archetypes are only primary reflections of the unconscious results that psychoanalysis denies the creational attributes of the individuals, so Lucian Blaga in his study, *Anthropological Aspects* reconsiders Yung's statements, saying that it is true that archetypes are closely related to the biological nature of the individual, but as they are accompanied by affection, involving cultural needs of the individual. Thus we have a rigorous synthesis of Blaga about archetypes, saying that in the individual's mental life we find factors that are present only in creative activity, Blaga calls them, *stylistic factors*, and fully assuming to the individuals, the style of a culture is armed in his vision of historicity. Approaching the complex issues of the archetypes, we found that Blaga is spiritual bound to Brancusi as a kind of enishi (Japanese term used for connection between people beyond time and space). Such analysis allows me to say that the sculptural technique used by Brancusi, is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the unconscious, named by Blaga *stylistic matrix*, of the Romanian people, *the mioritic space*, a horizon that emerges from the smooth inner Doina, from its resonances and projections, but also from the atmosphere and the spirit of our ballads. This horizon, corrugated indefinitely, emerges also from the feeling of destiny, from that feeling that has supremacy over the individual soul, ethnic or supraethnic” (Blaga, 1985, p. 196.). By this we can see that the essence of Brancusi sculptures lies in the ancestral dancing, hill-valley, we find the Romanian shepherd, his solidarity with the field, echo forever for the creative genius. Reading many exegetes of Brancusi, I found a genial interpretation of Ion Pogorilovschi in which classify the sculptor exegetes, from the four idols of Francis Bacon namely: idol tribes, idol species, idol fore, and idol theater summing up the various approaches, results from aesthetics and techniques, specific to each author which he appoints *brancusiologiei idols*”. (Pogorilovschi, 1976, p. 12)

Next I will try to identify the main archetypal forms which are found in works of Brancusi, in this sense I will use syntactic analysis, which implies an grammatical analysis of Brancusi sculptures (the relationship of sign with other signs). The Ovoid Cycle and the sleeping muses, the cycle of the birds, column, fish, coconut, and the female cycle (Portraits of Princess, Miss Pogany). Among these the most prevalent strategies of meaning are: ovoid, hourglass, column, pyramid, triangle, diamond, these signifying poor attempt of the individual to decode the dice of life. A proper justification of Brancusi sculptures also requires and an index of their, as for it we will mean the master semiosis in a chronological order that is required,

because of the unity that has been given to the humanity „Do not know what I leave you here”, these were the words of the sculptor Brancusi.

The Ovoid shape is announced in 1907 along with sculpture *The Kiss*, continued in 1910, as the funeral stele from Montparnasse cemetery, the parallelepiped stones Peter Comarnescu resemble it with those pillars of the dead, who sat at the crossroads of country, a habit usually maintained and after the appearance of Christianity „The sculptural vision of Brancusi embodies lateness and in a magistral synthesis, ancient echoes of the folklore and the dominate processes of the Romanian folk art” (Petru Comărnescu, 1972, p. 177.). Also in this category we meet sculptures like: *beginning of the world*, *New Born*, *Prometheus*, *Sculpture for the Blind*, *Caucele*, *dormant muses*, *Leda*, even the sculpture name *the fish* could be classified in the ovoid cycle, although the shape is more ellipsoidal, elongated, from here to *Brancusi Birds* and *Endless Column*, there is a long way. The Oval-round shape is primary and universal expression of many peoples like old Celtic, Greek, Egyptian, Tibetan, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese, Siberian and Indonesian peoples. In most myths, the egg is derived from the primordial waters, is the universal symbol of the perfection and of the world. It is clear that Brancusi take this cosmogonist myth from the philosophy of Milarepa, whose book circulated before 1922, as Mircea Deac tell us, he must have read also Mahabharata, whose beliefs about the beginning of the world still lies in an egg, the statues of Dyonissos found in the beotien graves were depicted with a egg in hand. It is interesting that Brancusi also called the sculpture *The Kiss*, *Capital* fragment, both in the exhibition of the autumn of the 1910 *in the Artistic Youth and Love*, as well as that of 1928 of the same association.

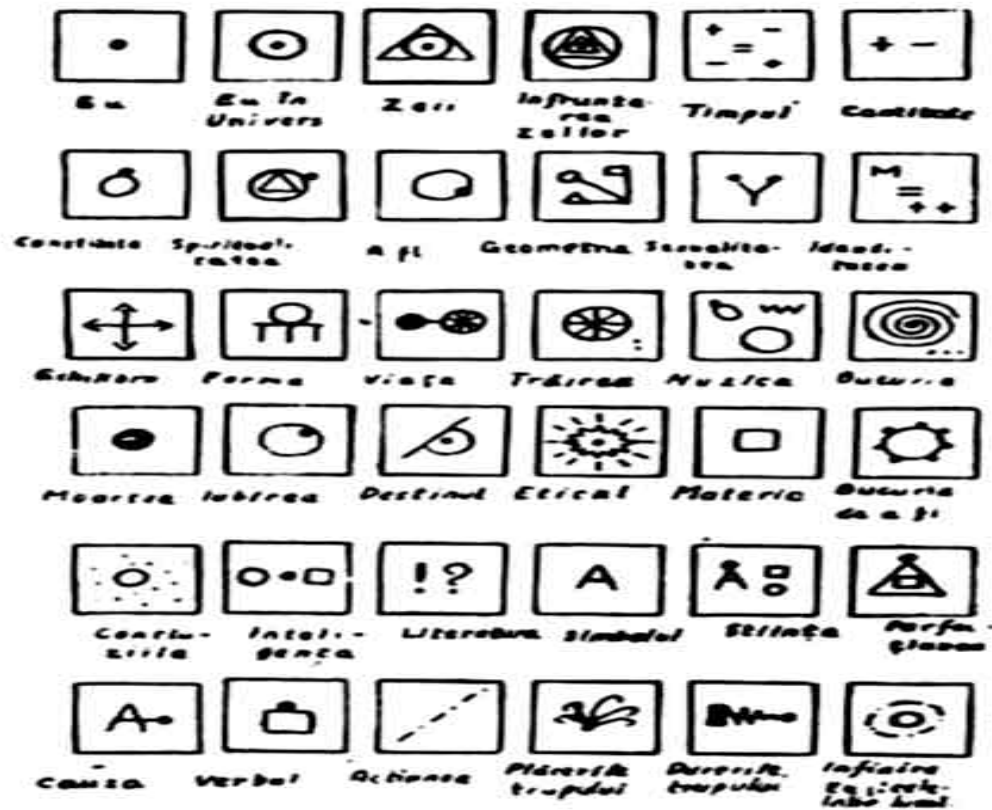
The Sleeping Muses cycle begins in 1910, now the oval designs the form of a true ovoid, this time the artist uses for these forms, the polishing process, the sculptural object takes on a glow untouched, unmatched until then by any other sculptor, light surrounds and defines the form. We can see the transition from the ovoid to the egg shape, *The infant* to *Sculpture for the Blind*, *Beginning of the world* (sitting on a flat base gloss seems almost unreal in a space universe away from our ethos), Paleologue finds the source of Brancusi inspiration in the Sanchoniaton texts, texts of Semitic origin about the creation of the world), *Prometheus*, followed by the cycle of Miss Pogany, where they make the transition from the elongated ovoid to the shape egg, interesting is that the eyes are elongated a cyclical dimension, losing their figurative features in two circles. The portrait of Miss Pogany is like the aristotelician syllogism whose validity results from the structure itself, indirectly

we can see the artist's obsession to get not only a perfect form, but to something that had never been created by humans. The artistic tendencies to reduce the essential synthetic forms arise from the opportunities for expression of materials: bronze, stone, wood. Matter has its life, the artist's hand has its senses, "when you carve stone, discover the spirit of matter, its own measure. Hand thinks and is thought of matter" (Ionel Jianu, apud Paul Monrad, 1926.). Throw the polished bronzes cycle, the master conceives a technique very similar to that used by Stone Age artisans polished, the evidence is the striking similarity, between Princess X and Venus of Lespugue discovered long after displaying the small sculptural ensemble in gloss we find the substance, a resonator power beyond across the centuries, the polished material in a synergistic action, whose purpose is to increase, to release the mind from the constraints of unconscious self. Brancusi kills the geometric form, the classicism, the academicism and carnal form.

To remember that the first time when was exposed the Portrait of Voievodesei X, at the Salon of 1920, a great impact in the artistic world of Paris, being removed from the exhibition by an inspector of police, of course that sculpture was restored later. Each of his work is marked, by the specifics of each drawing of the faces of dice; each transmission of his is a letter, a word, a cycle, a new era. In this way from now on the matter it will release us from the concept of spatial extension propelling us into the high spheres of thought behind the spheres imaginations, by submitting us to a new order.

In what follows I will try to make an analogy between drawings on the small dice faces and forms that we meet in the Brancusi sculptures.

The Dice that corresponds to the joy, we meet in the portrait realized by Brancusi to James Joyce; a spiral, shape, living, life, spirituality, love, the joy of being, I am the universe, perfection, gods, intelligence, music, equilibrium, matter, consciousness, to be; are present in the sculptural ensemble from Targu Jiu and obvious in *the ovoid cycle, female cycle, Danaides, wood cycle* especially in sculptures as: carvings and cycle *Chimera, Adam and Eve, Prodigal Son, the Witch*. The predominant dices are those which represent: sexuality, geometry, identity, intelligence, science, painful. Brancusi creations are all found in the die that is animated by a triangle enclosed in a circle and in turn that triangle is included in another triangle signifying both maturity-death-life and also a high aspiration for perfection.



The drawing of the dice faces (Paleolog, 1976, p. 45)

The ovoid becomes vertical, once with the cycle of the Gorgeous birds, chronologically speaking, as Pogorilovschi inform us, the first piece dates from 1910, the artist will end the long series of variants (29 variants, of which 7 as the gorgeous and 22 under the title, the bird in the air *Golden Bird, Yellow Bird*) over 31 years, in 1941, the latest version of *Bird in the air*. This bird is a gorgeous bird that we found in the Romanian fairy tales, although is a reason also taken from the ancient indian folklore, and gorgeous birds have the power to make various appearances. Perhaps the theme which always accompanied him, almost possessed him, who took him, from the external reality, he was never satisfied by the forms that he created, always considered that did not lead an end. The artist intended to carve a column of Kiss about 30 meters high and on the top of sacred enclosure of the birds, a Temple of gorgeousness.

Of all the sculptures of Brancusi, *Gorgeous bird* and *Bird in the air*, were most popular in the West, the gorgeous form of spaceless perfection, white, oval shaped with a slightly curved neck that ends in a beak ajar, giving us the impression that once we got to where the heavens open, calls us to itself., I wanted that the gorgeous to raise it's head without expressing a sense of pride, the pride, or defiance, said Brancusi. It was, for me, the hardest problem and I had much toil up to get to play through it the flight momentum". (Cassou, 1963, p .46) The version from 1914 is not oval but rather takes the form of an ellipse, it seems that the real masterpiece is in the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Palazzo of Leoni in Venice, version dates from 1915, as if,, the outpouring of infinite wave Doina "find it again the oval shape of the body. Between 1919 and 1941 we find various versions in the elliptical form that meets according the american sculptor Zorach W „simplicity and completeness of form in its entire splendor. Ovoid cycle reaches its final stage with the sculpture, beginning of the world, Brancusi egg is really the birth of the first unit cell of modern sculpture, one invisible, perfect form, virtual force, and explosive, a subtle emotional content and a huge promise." (Jianu, 1972, p. 8 -9)

The ovoid cycle is reflected in other sculptures as *Chimera* (to see that we also meet and the hourglass shape and more, the ovoid tends more to the roundness of the sphere). *Socrates*, *Leda*, *Princess X*, piece that although it was rejected, closely resembles an embryo, reflecting the principle of life as the first form, the quintessence of all primary forms. Other forms of signification in the works of Brancusi are: hourglass, column, rhomboidal, another form is identified by Traian D. Stănciulescu, it is about the cluster form, that is identified in the physical and biological evolution, also in biological and physical, form particle to AND, from the humans cell at the human society, evolution that we find in all archetypes of Brancusi „archetypal forms of the world who have been generated from invisible to visible, through a mechanism named *holographic resonance*, but are known and valued by the man down from visible to invisible" (Isac, Stănciulescu, 2006, p. 253-254.).

The ovoid theme also appears in other works as : *First Step*, *Prodigal Son*, the *Witch*, that are repeated in the same spirit: integration of the pedestal in the sculptural composition, frequency of ovoid, cylinders and curves, the introduction of vacuum both inside and outside, suggests the presence of fantastic. Egg shape combined with a cylinder we also meet in works as: *Three penguins in white marble*, which is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and *Leda white marble* "from the Art Institute of Chicago. The first of these two sculptures we see a gentle

motion, full of confidence, the eyes are like „Danaides", oval, facing inward, from visible to invisible. "We wonder what significance is still prevailing in the ovoid theme in the most of Brancusi sculptures.

Ionel Jianu considered that throw oval, curved lines, which actually Brancusi avoided the rigors of rough plans and geometric angles, giving to the volume an organic and epifenomenological inflection, this new surface ensures a flow of light. The ovoid has also the quality to look alive, because watched from all angles it gives the impression that it wants to rise, the movement of air is giving us a sense of boundlessness. For example the fish, its elliptical shape that crosses space seems like a thought, or a lightning: Brancusi gives to his marble fish an aerial transparency of the surface throw the polishing technique, and to the bronze fish a brilliant gloss. In both cases the matter loses weight, the stone becomes fluid, as the light would shine through it, while the metal is like sparkling scales, reflecting the sunlight". (Valentiner, 1946, p. 110)

The center piece of the Brancusi creation is the sculpture named The Endless Column, around which we can group, in terms of signification all the forms, that we have meet in the works of the sculptor. The 12 seats of the Table of Silence, Endless Column, and The cook are sculptures in which we find embedded hourglass code. The monumental ensemble from Târgu-Jiu is composed of several pieces, like *Endless Column* (29.35 m high, 95 cm thick, and build with copper iron); *Gate of the Kiss* (5.15 m high, long 6. 45m) and *Table of silence* surrounded by 12 chairs with round slats. The table of silence with 12 chairs with it hourglass form or funnel as Adrian Petringenaru calls them, sees in this sculpture a „die time, the time is making and consuming everything. The Die time is in the same time her own table" (Petringenaru, 1983, p. 11). Table of Silence, is also representing the mass confrontation of the heroes from the First World War with the combatants; the time is present but the hourglasses are moments that separate our heroes, of the fight and death. The circular arrangement of the seating involves a kind of ritual of death, as if the table is in a circle of death, those who have part in the table are 12, fateful figure, invoking the religious reason; *the saint dinner* or the *Fairies game*. Viewed from above looks like a clock, the inexorable passage of time, but the atmosphere here is slow static circle over circle, circle near circles, circles around the circle, as calm, everything seems to compress in a circle, the time seems suspended , broke from reality, surrounded by huge flocks of Parâng and Retezat, like our popular ballad Miorita.

Master takes the issue of kiss again, The Gate of the Kiss, marks the finality the kiss cycle, consisting of two thick rectangular columns, supported by an architrave heavier than them. Each column consists of four pillars, the four sides of the posts have each the kiss theme, on antablement is engraved a frieze, in which is repeated 40 times the same theme. Interesting in this way is the interpretation of Jianu, that counting them found a number of 48 reasons, which is a multiple of 4. Number four in antiquity and in the popular mythology was correlated with the four elements of the world (earth, water, air and fire) and the four seasons, four cardinal points, or the four stages of initiation into inner contemplation as Milarepa's philosophy. The Gate of Kiss from Targu-Jiu is the result of 30 years of the artist work, the stylization of life in its essence.

The endless column appears to support the sky with a golden thread, like the dome of St. Sophia, and we can thus see that not accidentally Sydney Geist, calls it, *the peak of modern art*,,, each octahedron of the column has a point of training, maximum extension and end point, but each is at the same time the beginning of the next cycle, which relies on it and rises above to be among the others and so on, above, above all" (Ibidem, p.15). The column can also be found in the specific traditional Romanian houses, pillars of wood, is actually an ancient custom, pre-Christian (it were put in graves in place crosses, carved pillars with rhomboidal reasons, combined with each others either rectangular or spherical). Paleologue from Brancusi childhood story will identify the rhomboids with the viper skin, which has exactly the middle line of rhomboid Brancusi.

We can look after the column archetype throw immersion not only in romanian space but everywhere, the entelechy, the atoms, all are included in this archetype: „ends the cycle of plastic creation of the heaven column began in the Neolithic". (Pogorilovschi, apud, Vulcănescu, 1972, p. 225)

„Germ, egg, trunk, flying, sleeping, the kiss and the number, all primary causes of the universe are found in their identity in the artist art and work, in the figures that the artist commands to the stone or metal. No sculpture ever approached, the hand of any other sculptor, not ever reached a perfect representation of the essences like Brancusi" (Cassou, 1963). Throw the ovoid cycle, kiss, hourglass, column, we understand the wholeness of syntactic analysis, in which the sign is represented by unit signifier-signified, in this case if we were to realize the analysis to a higher scale, Brancusi used material (stone, wood, marble), in support of the communication situations that is represented by the signifier, the capturing of the substantially-energy properties, the content will be represented by the signified,

that is a mental form in which the signification that the artist designed it, and at the same time sent it to us.

What is the signification at Brancusi? Brancusi philosopher answers: „the intimate collaboration between artist and materials used, such as joy and passion that unites the visionary craftsman, with enthusiasm and visionary zeal, take him of all essences, the idea itself us." (Zărnescu, apud Dumitrescu, 1967, p. 6).

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